

# WHAT LIES BENEATH? A PROCESS ANALYSIS OF AFFECTIVE EVENTS THEORY

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## ABSTRACT

*Since its publication in 1996, Affective Events Theory (AET) has come to be regarded as the seminal explanation for structure, causes and consequences of affective experiences at work. AET does not, however, elucidate why, how, and when objects and events in the workplace trigger moods and emotions which in turn influence cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Consequently, AET does not yet provide us with a theoretical basis upon which to predict the way in which contextual, cognitive, motivational, or individual factors might moderate the impact of workplace events on affective states and subsequent behavior. In this chapter, we outline the central tenets of AET, and review a model of the processes underlying AET, with a view to understanding individual differences in the manifestation and consequences of affect in the workplace.*

## INTRODUCTION

Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) Affective Events Theory (AET) represents a unique development in affect research, providing a model of the nature of

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affective responses to workplace events and the relationship between various affective states and workplace behaviors (Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Daus, 2002; see also Weiss & Beal, Chapter 1 in this volume). Weiss and Cropanzano posit in AET that environmental conditions, internal and external to the organization, that are perceived to promote or impinge upon personal well-being determine the occurrence of discrete “affective events” that lead to affective responses. Weiss and Cropanzano propose that, in turn, affective responses such as moods, feelings and emotions, influence workplace attitudes and behaviors. They argue, for example, that workplace events that trigger positive affective responses over time influence workplace attitudes such as job satisfaction, organizational trust and commitment, and impact upon workplace behaviors such as absenteeism, lateness, turnover, loyalty, and productivity.

The crux of AET is that elements of the organizational environment that are perceived to facilitate or to impair an organizational member’s progress toward workplace goals (i.e., experienced hassles or uplifts, often in response to events derived from top managers’ strategic decisions) lead to transient positive or negative affective responses (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). While Weiss and Cropanzano originally specified that affective events are internal to the workplace environment (intra-organizational), Ashkanasy and Ashton-James (2005) have more recently suggested that affective workplace events should be extended to include those that are external to the organization. In this instance, the external events can directly affect organizational outcomes and, by implication, may also facilitate or inhibit the workplace goals of top management. Ashton-James and Ashkanasy in particular listed extra-organizational events such as stock market fluctuations, legal and political policy changes, economic change and socio-cultural trends as events that may impact upon employees’ affective states, and consequently influence their attitudes and behavior at work.

As Weiss and Beal also note in Chapter 1, research on AET is still at a relatively early stage of development. Nonetheless, the literature reviewed below demonstrates that research to date has supported the central tenets of AET that workplace events trigger affective responses in employees, and that these affective responses influence workplace cognition and behavior. Yet, little is understood about the nature of the processes that underlie AET, and thus we do not know for whom and in what situations this model has most predictive and explanatory power. Our aims in this chapter are, therefore, to review the principal components of AET and to describe how the processes underlying these components can be affected by individual differences. In this latter respect, we describe a process model which has its

genesis in the “four-branch” model of emotional intelligence conceptualized by Mayer and Salovey (1997).

We begin with a review of empirical studies supporting the central tenets of AET. On the basis that the relationships between workplace events and affective responses on the one hand, and affective responses and workplace outcomes on the other, have been empirically validated, we then outline Ashkanasy, Ashton-James, and Jordan’s (2004) account of the mechanisms that mediate the impact of the workplace environment on individuals’ affect, and of individuals’ affect on behavior. In light of the proposed explanatory mechanisms, we outline individual differences that should moderate the impact of workplace events on moods and emotions, and of these moods and emotions on behavior. In conclusion, we discuss the implications of these propositions for our ability to predict and therefore moderate the impact of affect on individual and organizational-level outcomes.

## **AET: EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR CENTRAL PRINCIPLES**

The first principle of AET is that objects and events in the workplace have affective consequences for the individual. Brief and Weiss (2002) identify five categories of affective workplace events: Affective responses are elicited by stressful events or aversive conditions at work, leaders, interpersonal and group characteristics, physical settings, and organizational rewards and punishments. Notably, Weiss and Cropanzano’s (1996) conceptualization of affective workplace events is, both theoretically and empirically, restricted to events that are *internal* to the organization. As we noted above, however, Ashkanasy and Ashton-James (2005) have suggested an extension of the definition of an “affective workplace event” to include events that are *external* to the organization, but affect the strategic position of the organization. Empirical support for the affective consequences of internal and external organizational events is reviewed in turn below.

### *Internal Organizational Events*

The most commonly identified internal affective events are aversive workplace conditions that elicit stress-related responses. Stress-related workplace

events are associated with the experience of negative affective states arising from the perception of a threat to the attainment of personal goals (Lazarus, 1991). Common examples of stressful workplace events include conflicting role demands (Williams, Suls, Alliger, Lerner, & Wan, 1991), cognitive strain (Bodrov, 2000), time pressure (Baber, Mellor, Graham, Noyes, & Tunley, 1996), negotiating with administration (Hart, Wearing, & Headey, 1995), and physically threatening conditions (such as nursing patients with contagious disease; see George, Reed, Ballard, Colin, & Fielding, 1993). As such, stressful workplace events may be interpersonal, emotional, cognitive, or physical (Brief & Weiss, 2002).

Rafaeli and Kluger (2000) have demonstrated in particular that perceptions of the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the environment, and consequently actors' affective states, can be influenced by visual, olfactory, and auditory characteristics of the work environment. In their study, research participants reacting to photographs of eclectic and visually stimulating interior design reported positive affective states, whereas participants' reactions to monomorphic interior designs were considerably more negative. Research in consumer behavior has found similarly that pleasant scents induce positive affect, and trigger positive appraisals of the organizational environment (Bartoshuk, 1991; Chebat & Michon, 2003; Danghel, 1996). Oldham, Cummings, Mischel, Schmidtke, and Zhou (1995) observed along parallel lines that positively valenced music improved the mood states of workers. Finally, research on the effects of unpleasant noise on affect in the workplace has converged on the conclusion that unwanted and inescapable noise heightens anxiety and stress (Boussein & Ottmann, 1996; Gilbert, Meliska, & Plath, 1997).

Leaders also play an important role in the moderation of employees emotions (Pirola-Merlo, Härtel, Mann, & Hirst, 2002). According to George (1990, p. 84), "Leaders who feel excited, enthusiastic, and energetic themselves are likely to similarly energize their followers, and leaders who feel distressed and hostile are likely to negatively activate their followers." Similarly, Totterdell, Kellett, Teuchmann, and Briner (1998) showed that employee affective states are influenced by the collective mood of work teams. The pervasiveness of affect in group contexts has also been demonstrated by Barsade (2002) and Kelly and Barsade (2001). Several explanations have been proposed to explain affective processes within groups, including common socialization patterns and workplace conditions (Hackman, 1992), high task interdependence (Heath & Jourden, 1997), membership stability (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000), mood regulation norms and rules (Sutton, 1991), and emotion contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Irrespective

of the underlying process, nevertheless, it is clear that affect has a pervasive and powerful affect on groups in organizational settings.

### *External Organizational Events*

With respect to external organizational events that impact upon employees' affective states at work, Ashton-James and Ashkanasy (2004) identified events such as organizational change, legal and political change, inter-organizational negotiation, and economic transactions. Organizational change has been identified as a major source of stress for managers and employees (Mack, Nelson, & Quick, 1998; Mak & Mueller, 2001; Weiss, 2002). Organizational members manifest emotional responses to a variety of organizational change situations such as downsizing (Brockner, 1988; Torkelson & Muhonen, 2003), mergers (Buono & Bowditch, 1989; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991), job redesign (Mak & Mueller, 2001), and organizational restructuring (Begley, 1998). Organizational restructuring is associated with decreased job security (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Härtel, 2002), role conflict (Yousef, 2000), ambiguity and uncertainty (French, 2001), and decreased social support as work teams are redistributed (Swanson & Power, 2001). Each of the above consequences of organizational change was associated with negative impact upon employees' affective well-being.

On the broader scale, Ashton-James and Ashkanasy (2004) argue that social, political, legal, and economic changes have positive or negative consequences for progress toward organizational goals and thus may also impact upon employees' moods and emotions. Meyer (1982) introduced the term "environmental jolt" to describe employees' affective reactions to administrative and legal changes that impacted upon their work environment. Research by Loewenstein (2000) and colleagues (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2002; Lerner, Small, & Loewenstein, 2004) has demonstrated further that economic transactions have negative emotional consequences, particularly when the implications of acquiring and divesting resources are uncertain or involve risk. Loewenstein and Issacharoff (1994), on the other hand, highlight the positive affective consequences of economic events, or the "endowment effect". The endowment effect describes the phenomenon in which economic benefits come to be viewed as entitlements, even when the recipient was not expecting to receive anything (Loewenstein & Issacharoff, 1994). Loewenstein and his associates have further demonstrated that this

process is driven not by cognitive appraisal, but by deeply embedded affective reactions that drive subsequent decision-making.

According to Ashton-James and Ashkanasy (2004), the process of negotiating economic transactions between organizations may itself be viewed as an extra-organizational affective event. Negotiations give rise to positive or negative affective states depending on the extent to which negotiations are achieving individual goals (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Higgins, 1987; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). As such, if the process of negotiating a desired outcome is swifter than expected, positive affect may arise in the negotiator. On the other hand, if actors evaluate the other party's behavior to impede progress toward the negotiation of desired outcomes, negative emotions emerge (Kumar, 1997).

In summary, the research reviewed above supports the first principle of AET, that workplace events, both internal and external to the organization, trigger affective responses in those employees. Positive affective states will result from the perception of events that represent an opportunity for progress toward workplace goals, and negative affective states will manifest in response to workplace events that are perceived to threaten progress toward workplace goals. As discussed in the following, the second principle of AET is how these affective responses to workplace events influence their subsequent cognition and behavior, and ultimately workplace functioning. While workplace events may elicit both moods and emotions, the following review is limited to the impact of diffuse positive and negative mood states on workplace functioning.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF AFFECT IN THE WORKPLACE

One of the more important theoretical contributions of AET is the principle that an individual's affective responses to workplace events influences his or her moment-to-moment cognition and behavior (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Weiss & Beal, this volume). As such, organizational members' workplace functioning is *more* reliably predicted by their affective responses to workplace conditions than stable workplace attitudes, habituated behaviors, and organizational values (Fisher, 2000; Weiss, Nicholas, & Daus, 1999). The influence of positive and negative moods on workplace cognition and behavior is discussed in turn below.

*Workplace Cognition*

The cognitive consequences of affect are as many as they are diverse. Cognitive flexibility, attentional focus, motivational fit, context-dependence, top-down (heuristic) versus bottom-up (systematic) processing, and self versus other orientation are just a selection of the cognitive functions that are affected by mood. Isen and colleagues (Isen & Daubman, 1984; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987; Isen, Johnson, Mertz, & Robinson, 1985) have demonstrated that positive affect predicts greater creativity and cognitive flexibility, enhancing people's perception of category-fit, or similarity between disparate objects, while negative mood leads to greater recognition of dissimilarity between objects. Consequently, employees in a positive mood are better able to generate ideas, make associations between disparate objects and information, and identify alternatives (Isen, 2001). Where task performance is related to these abilities, therefore, employees in a positive affective state may demonstrate enhanced workplace functioning. On the other hand, employees in a negative affective state are better able to identify discrepancies between related stimuli and show increased accuracy on detail-oriented and rule-based problem-solving tasks (James, Broderson, & Eisenberg, 2004). The task performance of employees of financial, accounting, or engineering organizations, for example, may benefit from flattened affect when it occurs during daily mood cycles (Clark, Watson, & Leeka, 1989).

Isen (2001) also argues that positive mood is connected to a reduced number of self-related, task-irrelevant cognitions, and consequently facilitates task involvement and attention to task demands. With regards to motivational fit, Forgas (2002) argues that the impact of mood affects motivated information processing such that people in a positive mood are more "promotion-focused" while people in a negative mood are "prevention-focused". Mood also affects the extent to which people focus on peripheral versus central cues when processing visual information; people in a positive mood are more likely to be more context-dependent, using "global processing", while people in a negative mood are more likely to attend to process details before constructing an overall evaluation (i.e., "local processing"; see Gasper & Clore, 2002). Similarly, Bodenhausen, Kramer, and Süsser (1994) have shown that mood affects people's use of heuristic and systematic processing. Happy people demonstrate a tendency to rely on established knowledge structures (such as stereotypes) to interpret information rather than using systematic processing to evaluate an object based on unique or individuating features. As a consequence of these information processing effects of mood, people who are in a positive affective state demonstrate

more efficient decision-making, relying more readily on pre-existing knowledge structures rather than situation-specific cues (Fiedler, 2001). In a sad mood, on the other hand, people are more vigilant in their processing of environmental cues and may therefore demonstrate better risk perception (Lerner & Keltner, 2001), more thorough information search behavior, critical and conservative evaluation of alternatives, and prevention-focused decision-making (Higgins, 2001).

Affect may not only influence the way in which information is processed, but also the content of judgments and evaluations. The Affect Priming Model (Bower, 1981) describes the way in which people's affective states facilitate attention to, memory for, and retrieval of mood-congruent information. Consequently, people in a positive mood are more likely to attend to a person's positive attributes when forming an impression, are likely to have greater memory for stimuli that was encoded in a positive mood, and greater access to, or faster retrieval of information that is associated in memory with positive affect. The content of people's judgments and evaluations are, therefore, biased by mood such that more positive evaluations of people, objects, or events are made when one is in a positive mood and more negative impressions or interpretations are formed when people are in a negative mood (Bower, 1981; Bower & Forgas, 2001). As a result of the content effects of mood on cognition, employees in a happy mood are likely to evaluate environmental information more positively than people in a negative mood and consequently perceive more opportunities than threats (Lerner & Keltner, 2001), form more positive impressions of people (Fiedler & Bless, 2001), and lead to more optimistic or promotion-oriented decisions (Higgins, 2001).

### *Workplace Behavior*

As a consequence of the content and information processing effects of mood, positive and negative affective events may influence workplace behavior. For example, through its influence on risk perception, mood can affect individuals risk taking behavior (Mittal & Ross, 1998). Positive and negative affect can also influence social judgments, which have implications for social interactions in the workplace (Forgas & George, 2001). Perceptions and interpretations of task performance, for example, affect managers' performance feedback which has important consequences for employees' subsequent task performance. In their meta-analysis of the effects of feedback on performance, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) concluded that, while

feedback does on average improve performance, the relationship between feedback and performance depends on the valence (positive or negative), specificity (directness), and politeness of the communication. Forgas and his colleagues have demonstrated that positive and negative mood influence the valence of people's performance appraisals (Forgas, Bower, & Krantz, 1984), the directness of interpersonal communication (Forgas, 1999) and the politeness of communication strategies (Forgas, 1999); and further, the way in which feedback is interpreted (Bower & Forgas, 2001). This research cumulatively suggests that the mood state of both the person giving the feedback and the person receiving performance feedback may significantly influence an individual's responses to performance feedback.

A second interpersonal exchange that is of particular relevance to adaptive functioning in the workplace is *requesting*. When formulating a request, people must phrase their request with care so as to maximize the likelihood of compliance by being assertive or direct, yet avoid the danger of giving offence by being too direct, or aggressive (Gibbs, 1985). Requesting is a common interpersonal exchange in organizations that has potentially important outcomes for individuals ability to achieve workplace goals. For example, if certain software must be used to complete a project and the individual cannot install or use the software, completion of the job depends upon the successful request of help from an informed colleague.

As demonstrated by Forgas (1998, 1999), people in a positive affective state adopt a more confident and direct requesting style, which is congruent with their positive interpretation of situational demands. This result can also be explained by the affect priming theory, which would suggest that as a result of positive affect, there was a greater availability of positively valenced thoughts and associated memories in the assessment of the felicity of the interpersonal encounter. Negative mood, however, results in significantly more polite, elaborate, and cautious request forms than positive moods. In the workplace, therefore, it may be hypothesised that new or novice employees may be more susceptible to the effects of their temporary affective states on the formulation of requests.

Negotiation is another interpersonal task relevant to workplace outcomes that is influenced by affective state. Conflict is an ever present feature of organizational life, and face to face negotiation is perhaps the most common and constructive method for resolving differences between people and between groups. Recent cognitive investigations of negotiation strategies suggest that biased perceptions and assumptions are a major cause of suboptimal bargaining strategies and outcomes (Thompson, 1990). Several researchers (e.g., Baron, 1990; Carnevale & Isen, 1986; Forgas, 1998) have

found that affect is an important source of bias in the negotiation process. Consistent with the “affect-as-information model” of mood effects on cognition, positive and negative moods prime mood-congruent thoughts and associations when contemplating a negotiation encounter and thus exert a significant influence on individuals plans, goals, and bargaining strategies (Neal & Bazerman, 1991).

As we mentioned previously, people in a happy mood perform better on creative problem solving tasks, demonstrate lower levels of anger and hostility, and are more altruistic, optimistic, and flexible, and are more inclined to be helpful (Forgas et al., 1990; Hertel & Fiedler, 1994; Isen, 1987). Consistent with these findings, Carnevale and Isen (1986) found that individuals experiencing positive affect are less likely to adopt contentious negotiating strategies than others. Furthermore, Baron (1990) and Forgas (1999) found that individuals in a positive mood are more conciliatory, make more concessions, and are more likely to reach a compromise than people in a negative mood. In a follow up study, Forgas (1998) demonstrated that happy people are more confident during the negotiation process, are more assertive and persistent in reaching their desired goals, behave more cooperatively, and are more willing to use integrative strategies and make reciprocal deals than were those in a negative mood.

While positive affect may be advantageous in negotiations for which an integrative agreement is desired, negative mood may facilitate better outcomes in situations where a tough bargainer image is required (Wall, 1991). A tough bargaining strategy is appropriate where the stakes for each negotiator are high and where the negotiation script calls for tough and competitive bargaining. As such, negative affect is functional in negotiations where an integrative result is untenable. Negative affect may also serve an important informational function (Schwarz, 1990), enabling actors to develop strategies that are appropriate to the environment. Van de Vliert (1985) proposed that, by intensifying perceived and experienced conflict in the negotiation processes, negative affect motivates actors to resolve conflict. Consistent with this rationale, Daly (1991) suggests that in a negotiating setting, anger can be used to highlight the importance of a given issue to a negotiator, and motivate the actor to persist with negotiations. In conclusion, both positive and negative affect may have positive consequences for negotiations, depending on the negotiation context (i.e., whether an integrative or winner-take-all solution is desired). Positive affect facilitates negotiations that are integrative and collaborative. Negative emotions, on the other hand, promote more competitive bargaining.

In contrast to the interpersonal functions of both positive and negative affect, the impact of affect on group performance is restricted to positive

emotion, where negative emotion is destructive to group processes and consequently productivity. In a recent study, Barsade, Ward, Turner, and Sonnenfeld (2000) found that work groups low in mean positive affect experienced significantly more task and emotional conflict and less cooperation and group cohesion than groups high in mean positive affect. Congruent with this finding, Barsade (2002) found that positive emotional contagion in groups was related to increased perceived task performance, improved cooperation, and decreased conflict. As such, positive emotion appears to be a necessary precursor of group cohesiveness and productivity. In the context of organizational work groups, George (1990) has shown further that positive affect is a key ingredient for group effectiveness and satisfaction (see also George & Brief, 1996). Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2000) also found that positive emotion solidifies and strengthens the person-group bond and decreases uncertainty; as a result, commitment to work team goals increases. On the other hand negative affect was found to decrease team cohesion, motivation, and ultimately to impair team performance.

A further issue is that, for many years, affect researchers have debated the *functional* role of affect in the workplace (George & Brief, 1996; Pekrun & Frese, 1992; Staw & Barsade, 1993). While some have argued that positive affect leads to better workplace outcomes than negative affect (Isen, 1984), others have found that negative affect has benefits over positive affect for workplace functioning (Staw & Barsade, 1993; George, 1990; George & Brief, 1996). After years of research into the consequence of positive and negative affect for workplace cognition and behavior, however, it is clear that whether or not positive or negative mood facilitates, impairs, or even affects cognitive and behavioral outcomes depends on the task in which the employee is engaged, as well as situational and personal features. Thus while happy people are often referred to as “mindless” (Schwarz & Clore, 1991), and while people in a negative mood are “sadder-but-wiser” (Staw & Barsade, 1993), these affective stereotypes may represent the exception rather than the rule in many organizational settings. Indeed, our reading of this literature leads us to the conclusion that the effect of positive and negative mood as a means to facilitate, to impair, or even to affect cognitive and behavioral outcomes at all, depends on the way in which situational, personal, and task features interact with the processes that give rise to these outcomes. With this in mind, we now turn our attention to a more detailed discussion of the Ashkanasy et al. (2004) process model. In this integrative model, the authors addressed the processes by which affective states are generated in response to workplace events and influence cognition and behavior. In particular, the model allows us to consider how individual dif-

ferences in emotional intelligence may moderate the impact of affective events on employees’ mood states and behavior.

### A PROCESS ANALYSIS OF AET

Ashkanasy et al. (2004) developed their affect regulation model (ARM) to explain why it is that workplace events trigger affective responses in employees, and why it is that affective states affect employees’ cognitions and behaviors differently. While the model has not been subject to empirical testing, it is essentially a synthesis of the principles of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), appraisal processes (Frijda, 1986, 1993; Lazarus, 1991), and the resource-based theory of self-regulation (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Harmon-Jones, 2001). The resulting model is a dual-process model of affective response generation and regulation (Fig. 1). Affective response processes are thus conceptualized as having two systems that work interdependently to generate affective responses on the one hand, and regulate affective responses on the other. The component processes underlying each affective response mechanism are then classified according to their functional role in the processing of affective information. These functional labels correspond to the four “branches” of Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) emotional intelligence model: emotion perception, emotion assimi-

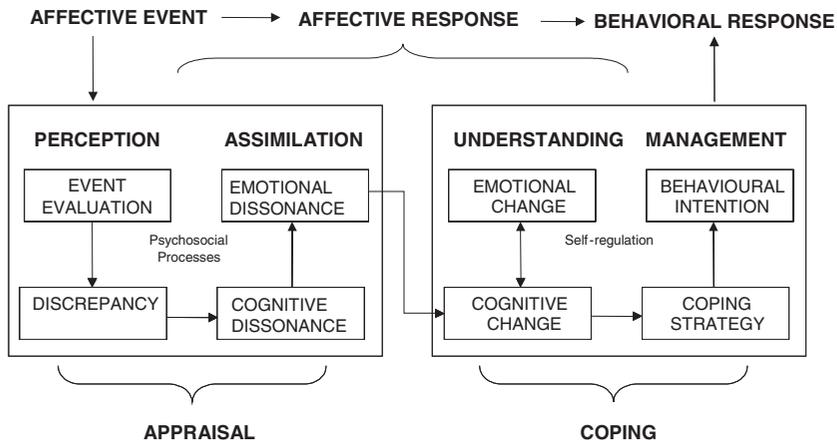


Fig. 1. The Affect Regulation Model. Source: Ashkanasy, James, & Jordan (2004), © Elsevier Science (2004).

lation, emotion understanding, and emotion management. As shown in Fig. 1, generative affective responses function to perceive and assimilate affective information, and emotion understanding and management are a function of regulatory affective response processes.

The processes that perform these functions correspond to the appraisal processes described by Lazarus (1991) in his cognitive-motivational-relational theory of social behavior. As such, emotion perception is a manifestation of “primary appraisal”, emotion assimilation is associated with “secondary appraisals”, emotion understanding is underpinned by “reappraisals”, and emotion management with “coping appraisals”.

### *The Affect Generation Processes*

#### *Primary Appraisal and Emotion Perception*

According to Ashkanasy et al. (2004), the primary stage of affect generation in response to workplace events involves the detection of their relevance for social functioning (Scherer, Schorr, & Johnston, 2001). This is an involuntary, or automatic psychological function based on the peripheral processing of social stimuli with reference to the social psychological resources of the individual (Scherer et al., 2001). Primary appraisal is the mechanism through which the valence of social stimuli is implicitly perceived (Roseman, 1984). The identification of a stimuli-resource discrepancy triggers a reflex response, analogous to a psychophysiological orienting response, which directs cognitive resources to the affective event for further evaluation of its relevance or consequences for social adaptive functioning (Scherer et al., 2001).

A person with high-functioning emotion perception will perceive and respond to important environmental cues, while someone with low-functioning emotion perception would either fail to be discriminatory and selective in their perception of affective social stimuli, and hence their processing of situational demands would be overburdened and inefficient, or they would fail to detect relevant environmental stimuli at all, with similarly negative consequences for effective social functioning (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

#### *Secondary Appraisal and Emotion Assimilation*

The nature of the affective event – whether the signal value of the cue is positive or negative – is evaluated by the secondary appraisal component of the generative affective response process. The secondary appraisal mechanism thus enables individuals to assess if discrepancies between social goals,

social functioning, and social outcomes (identified by the primary appraisal) are attributable to deficits in social (cognitive and behavioral) functioning or social functioning *capabilities* (Lazarus, 1991). Secondary appraisal is thus a comparative process whereby the consonance or dissonance between social cognitions, behaviors, and the reality of social events or outcomes is evaluated. The outcome of this evaluation is an appraisal of the extent of discrepancy in social functioning and, hence, the extent of adaptive cognitive or behavioral change required for a renewal of adaptive functioning.

Ashkanasy and Ashton-James (2005) propose that the secondary appraisal component of affective response generation is explainable in terms of emotional assimilation. In this sense, emotional assimilation defines the accuracy with which the social psychological resource discrepancy is evaluated. The secondary appraisal process identifies the source of discrepancy and evaluates its potential impact upon adaptive functioning with reference to the goals of existing social psychological behaviors and attitudes. As such, high-functioning emotional assimilation would function to modify the primary appraisal, and act as a checking mechanism.

Further, a novel environmental stimulus may be detected by the primary appraisal as a potential environmental demand or threat that one is not equipped to deal with. After secondary appraisal, however, when the source of the initial affective reaction is identified and evaluated, the actor is likely to realize that no cognitive or behavioral adaptation is necessary for that particular stimulus. If the actor has low-functioning emotion assimilation, however, primary appraisals of environmental cues that are not of any real significance to adaptive success may not be detected and hence the affective cue will be integrated into the affect cognition of subsequent behavioral responses.

### *Affect Generation*

An affective response is generated automatically in response to a comparative evaluation (secondary appraisal) of the perceived discrepancy between environmental challenges and available adaptive resources. Positive affect is generated in response to the evaluation of situational demands for which one is fully equipped to cope; while negative affective response is generated in response to the recognition of a deficit in cognitive, affective, or behavioral resources required to meet situational goals. The intensity of the affect triggered is relative to the consequences of this discrepancy for one's adaptive success. The consequences of the generation of a felt positive or negative affective response for interpersonal functioning are then determined by how the individual copes with this affective information. This model equates the

term “coping” with affect-regulation, which, as depicted in Fig. 1, is mediated by reappraisals and coping appraisals of the affective information generated by primary and secondary situation appraisals.

Ashkanasy et al. (2004) argue that individual differences in the adaptive functioning of one’s emotion assimilation may also explain differences in the nature and intensity of an individual’s emotional reaction to the appraisal of workplace events. Emotional assimilation processes ensure that the person understands the meaning or adaptive significance of social cues: whether it is salient and reflects a need for social adaptive changes, or whether it has been detected erroneously. Ashkanasy et al. suggest two reasons for which a person may respond affectively to social cues that do not pose any real threat or opportunity: firstly, as is often the case in the workplace, attentional resources may not be available as they are being utilized to cope with more significant environmental demands; and secondly, cognitive resources for processing complex situational cues may not be adequate, for example, due to fatigue, stress, or mental strain.

If affect generation processes are functioning adaptively, then the intensity of the affect generated will correspond to the urgency with which the individual must adjust his or her social, cognitive, or behavioral functioning (Higgins, 2001). This is because emotions with high intensity are triggered by greater social cognitive dissonance, which increases motivational resources to respond to environmental demands by making adaptive changes to one’s attitudes or behavior (Harmon-Jones, 2001).

In summary, the affect generation response is mediated by appraisal processes, which identify discrepancies between individual functioning and environmental demands. As we noted earlier, Ashkanasy et al. (2004) cast these processes in terms of Mayer and Salovey’s (1997) model of emotional intelligence, where emotional perception and assimilation moderate the nature and intensity of the emotions generated. The resulting affect motivates attitudinal and/or behavioral changes. Affect regulation response processes, discussed below, determine the social, cognitive and behavioral outcomes of this change.

### *The Affect Regulation Processes*

Affect regulation processes are, in essence, cognitive processes whereby affective states are modulated and utilized to facilitate adaptive functioning (Carver & Scheier, 1999). Thus, according to Ashkanasy et al. (2004), affect generation processes mediate the relationship between workplace conditions

and affective state, and affective regulation processes moderate the impact of affective responses on workplace outcomes. They propose in particular that affect regulation processes involve two appraisal components: reappraisal and coping appraisal (Folkman, Lazarus, Dubkle-Schetter, De Longis, & Gruen, 1983). While affect generation processes are assumed to use automatic or non-conscious cognitive processing, both reappraisal and coping appraisal involve cognitive and emotional control (Lazarus, 1991).

#### *Reappraisal and Emotion Understanding*

It is the task of reappraisal to determine the most appropriate social psychological adjustments to make in response to the affective state generated through primary and secondary appraisals (Folkman et al., 1983). Reappraisal requires an accurate understanding of the individual's own resource capabilities in order to make either attitudinal or behavioral adjustments. If the nature of the discrepancy is that personal goals cannot be met by personal resources, then a change in attitudes regarding the affective significance of the social goals is required. That is, goal priorities must be adjusted such that the affective significance of an obstacle to its attainment is reduced. On the other hand, if the discrepancy in goal attainment is owing to inadequate resource deployment, the person affected can either increase resource output (behavioral) to cope with the demands of the social task, or reduce the affective significance of the social outcomes by adjusting social goals (attitudes).

Affect reappraisal thus requires an understanding of the way in which cognitive and behavioral change can modulate emotional states. As such, the process model depicted in Fig. 1 accommodates the notion that affect regulation processes require emotional understanding – which is associated with emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) – for the effective adjustment of cognitive and behavioral responses to affective states. As we noted previously, emotional understanding involves an appreciation of the way in which emotions can affect behavior and cognitions negatively and positively; it encompasses the ability to modulate affective responses for the facilitation of social performance, rather than the decrement of performance (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Thus, emotional understanding is a function of the reappraisal process by which decisions regarding cognitive and behavioral responses to negative affective responses to environmental demands are made.

If positive affective states are generated in response to a workplace event, however, emotion understanding is required for the individual to recognize the adaptive significance of this affective response. That is, in a positive

affective state, reappraisal processes function to evaluate the behavioral antecedents of positive environmental reinforcers, such that these adaptive behaviors can be maintained.

#### *Coping and Emotion Management*

Coping appraisal formulates an adaptive interpersonal response to affective and environmental stimuli based on the outcome of the reappraisal. Ashkanasy et al. (2004) propose that emotion management is the affective cognitive strategy associated with emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) that monitors the impact of behavior modifications on one's adaptive success. Emotion management utilizes the individual's changing affective state as a gauge of adaptive interpersonal responding; if the behavioral strategies formulated in the coping appraisal process are maladaptive, the person will receive negative social feedback, which will in turn generate negative affect (in the same affect generation process described above). As such, the process model incorporates the idea that coping requires a capacity for emotion management in order for the individual to maintain or to regain self-regulation of emotions and cognitions and, subsequently, of their behavior.

#### *Affect Regulation*

In effect then, Ashkanasy et al.'s (2004) process model implies that the affective-cognitive processes that mediate the relationship between an employee's affective state and workplace functioning are self-regulatory processes that are perhaps implicated in behavioral inhibition. These processes not only directly mediate interpersonal outcomes, therefore, but also indirectly mediate the effect of workplace conditions upon interpersonal outcomes. Affect regulation processes thus serve two roles. In the first instance, they act to minimize the emotional consequences of affective events (reappraisal). Secondly, they act to alert the individual to potentially maladaptive or negative coping response strategies (coping). As such, affect regulation is conceptualised in the model as a process that involves the controlled cognition of affective states as well as the continual (automatic) monitoring of the affective consequences of behavioral responses to affective events in the workplace.

From a practical perspective, the model further reinforces the point that workplace conditions play a pivotal role in determining affective and interpersonal outcomes for employees. Employees face hassles and uplifts

from varied sources on a daily basis. Ashkanasy et al. (2004) emphasize the fact that affective events can come from interactions with peers, subordinates, or supervisors, and from within or without the organization; as such, the impact of the workplace on affective states cannot be avoided. A corollary of this, moreover, is that the outcome of affective workplace events for behavior is mediated by social psychological processes, the adaptive functioning of which is moderated by emotional intelligence, or the ability accurately to perceive, to assimilate, to understand, and to manage internal and external affective information (the affective states of oneself and others). Consequently, Ashkanasy et al. argue that practical training in emotional intelligence, teaching employees and managers that affective responses are not necessarily an accurate representation of situational cues, can motivate people to control or regulate emotion-driven responses.

In summary, the process model we have outlined in this chapter describes why it is that individuals have different affective responses to workplace events, and the social cognitive processes that regulate the impact of these affective states on workplace cognition and behavior. In effect, the model provides a logical platform for understanding of the processes that underlie the generation of affect in the workplace, and the processes that moderate the impact of affect on cognition and behavior.

## CONCLUSIONS

AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) has had a profound effect on our understanding of the key role played by emotions and effect in organizations. In this essay, we have attempted to address what we have identified as a potential weakness in the model; namely, that AET does not provide in-depth explanations for the processes underlying affect in the workplace context. We have addressed this shortcoming in terms of the Ashkanasy et al. (2004) model of the processes by which affect is generated and subsequently impacts on behavior. This model provides an explanation of the linkage between affective events and their consequences by explicating processes of perception, assimilation, understanding, and emotion management, which parallel the branches of emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

In conclusion, the explanations that we have proffered offer additional insights into the central role that affect plays in work settings. Nonetheless, and like Weiss and Beal in Chapter 1, we acknowledge that our explanations still leave many issues unanswered. Many of the influences in organizations

operate at multiple levels (Ashkanasy, 2003), often interacting to produce complex effects that are little understood. In this respect, we hope that our process analysis will provide at least a modicum of additional understanding of these processes.

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